REPORT

OF THE

SCHOOL COMMITTEE,

OF

WILLIAMSBURG,

FOR THE YEAR ENDING APRIL 30, 1856.

BOSTON.

PRINTED AT 144 WASHINGTON STREET,

1856.

REPORT.

Individual responsibility of parents, as well as that of all others interested in the intellectual, literary, moral and religious training of youth, was formerly more than at present, considered indispensably necessary to its success.—Parents felt it incumbent on them to watch over the conduct and education of their children with such solicitude as to evince the conviction that both depended wholly on their own efforts. Their duty now in this respect, is the same that it was fifty years ago. Increase in population, wealth and refinement, the multiplication of temptations to vice, allurements to pleasure, and all those influences which tend to divert the young from the line of truth and duty require that these efforts should be redoubled. It is not safe to trust the education of a child to society at large, unless every individual of that society has been well trained under the paternal roof.

The appointment of committees and other public functionaries to superintend schools does not release parents and guardians from their previous duties and obligations, but is intended to render the system of popular education adopted in this Commonwealth more efficient and perfect in its execution.

Some still continue to discharge their duties in this respect and aid all efforts put forth for the improvement of their children. By such the services of all who cooperate with them are appreciated and rewarded. Others seem to have lost interest in moral and intellectual progress leaving the matter to chance, or the care of the public ; and not a few, either from passion, prejudice, or a belief that the practical application of the measures recommended by the Legislature, Board of Education, and others acting under their authority, is useless and injurious to common schools, advocate old methods and oppose the new. Some practical knowledge of any art or science, is necessary to enable any one to judge of the expediency, propriety or utility of the means to be adopted to promote it. To illustrate this proposition, it may not be improper to remark, that some scholars who do not make much progress in their studies complain to their parents that the teachers do not *explain* sufficiently ; that they are not assisted in the solution of difficult points in their lessons, or exercises, and consequently the instructor alone is responsible for the failure. If the parent knows nothing more about the matter than what is told by the child, he may, and sometimes does keep the child at home for the reason assigned. This scholar is not required to shew that he has done any thing in compliance with the wishes of his instructor which it is his right and duty to demand, that he has been obedient and industrious, that he has made vigorous and protracted efforts to accomplish all in his power in understanding, retaining and practising all that is required of him. A little knowledge on the subject and a little inquiry in most instances would satisfy the parent that such a child delighted in nothing but idleness and mischief.

To secure and if possible increase the usual interest manifested in the success of schools, your Committee have solicited the cooperation of all the prudential committees and some others, in the choice of teachers, in determining the amount of wages and the length of the terms, as well as in other matters about which they were disposed to confer. In two instances from want of seasonable information some dissatisfaction and interruption was occasioned, but in all other cases the committees and those who chose to join them in their efforts, acted together harmoniously. Nearly half the teachers employed were recommended by prudential committees, or others belonging to the districts for which they were respectively engaged, and the result it is believed, has been a greater degree of energy, efficiency and progress than has usually been heretofore attained.

A vote of the town requiring the school committee to select and contract with teachers, carried out in the manner above indicated, would always in the opinion of the committee, improve the condition of our schools by securing the joint action of those whose duty and interest demand their efforts in promoting the cause of popular education. The benefit of any such vote must depend entirely upon the *manner* in which the power conferred is executed. Moreover, the success of teachers depends much upon their personal appearance and address. The super-intending committee ought to be chosen from that number whose sagacity and experience would enable them to select from the applicants for schools those who excelled in these as well as in their literary qualifications. To prepare them for this the parties must have been previously acquainted, or they must have a personal interview, and that ought to take place before an engagement is made. Of the numerous applicants for schools who usually present themselves to a com-

mittee at the proper time a good selection can generally be made without much difficulty. The committee whose duty it is to assume the responsibility of employing teachers ought to be consulted in their selection. And if this is done before the time has elapsed during which applications for schools are usually made much evil would thereby be avoided. Teachers have generally been presented for examination in this town immediately before, or on the day specified for the commencement of the term for which they had been engaged. At such a time the examining committee could not reject a teacher on the same grounds that they might previous to an engagement. The literary qnalifications of the applicant would be all that would be likely to be taken into account. Then, too, it would be much more difficult than before, to supply the place of a rejected teacher by a better one. Besides, if a teacher is dismissed for any cause after the commencement of the term, no one is willing to be responsible for the injury done to the school ; the delay, the difficulty in procuring another teacher and the criminations and re-criminations which usually follow such an occurrence. If the school committee always had a voice in the selection of teachers they would very seldom be dismissed before the expiration of the time for which theywere engaged. The reputation of committee and teachers would be more connected than heretofore and consequently one more motive would be added to those already existing, to induce the board to be more faithful, industrious and persevering in the discharge of their responsible duties.

From the time that Williamsburg became a corporate town to the present year, the money raised for the support of schools has been paid over to the prudential committees of the several districts to be expended by them at their discretion. No serious inconvenience has resulted from this

usuage, but small sums left in the hands of committees after their terms of service have expired, are presumed to have been lost by neglect and other causes andin some cases money might be allowed to accumulate in the hands of committees and transferred from one to another until the office of prudential committee would be desirable for the purpose of securing the use of the surplus money belonging to the district. It might then become an object to increase this surplus by hiring cheap teachers instead of good ones, and thus in some measure defeat the object of the town in raising the money. As the amount ofmoney raised by the town for the support of schools is constantly increasing and consequently its custody and expenditure have become proportionably of greater importance, the selectmen, treasurer and committee have adopted a plan which they consider free from these objections. The committee divide the money according to a vote of the town and furnish the treasurer with a copy of the result ; the treasurer opens an account with each district giving credit for the sum to which it is entitled and charging such sums as are claimed and paid from time to time as they become due for services of teachers, board, fuel, &c. by order of the committee. If small sums should remain unexpended at the end of the year they would stand to the credit of the same district the next and there would be no inducement to suffer school money to accumulate. The committee are of opinion that this plan ought to be continued as a permanent regulation.

For information relative to the expenditures of the sev eral districts reference may be had to the account or report of the treasurer.

Without assuming to decide how much freedom in the conduct of scholars in school, is compatible with their intellectual and moral improvement, it is certain that they must be subject to the authority of their teachers and that teachers

must be sustained by parents and guardians in securing obedience. Few teachers possess the power of commanding implicit obedience without the aid of these influences which those interested and society at large can and ought to exert in their favor.

The increasing cares of business have probably diverted the attention of many especially in this village, from domestic duties and family discipline. A laxity of morals and a full developement of the mischievous propensities of children has been the result. Annoyances from this source have been in progress and increasing for a year or two past to such an extent as to arouse many of the inhabitants of the town and especially those of the centre district to make an unusual effort to suppress the evil. Public and private disturbance and damage of property, insubordination in school which resulted in the dismissal of one teacher, caused meetings to be held and continued for a considerable length of time to see what measures ought to be taken in the premises.

By discussing the subject and adopting a code of by-laws for the regulation of the schools in the village, an impression was made which resulted in some temporary benefit to society and the schools.

By the cooperation and assistance of prudential committees and others interested, we venture the assertion that better teachers than those whose services were secured for the past year have not been employed in this town for a long time. Some freedom of deportment in subordination to the will of the teacher was observed, but generally order reigned and literature advanced in a corresponding ratio.

The schools in the centre district have been well conducted the past year. In the opinion of the committee, better schools have not been kept in this district for the past ten years. The deportment of the scholars especially, in

school and in the street, was remarkably docile, and appropriate.

The senior department of No. 3, winter term, was conducted on the method adopted by Normal schools, and with better success than has heretofore resulted from the labors of teachers of that class in this town.

The summer term of No. 5, was taught with less efficiency and profit, probably, than any school during the past year, but it was by no means a failure.

The schools in No. 6, were excellent The conduct of the scholars was scrupulously correct and their recitations evinced much attention to study and a corresponding progress. Their exercises at one examination reached a point of perfection seldom attained.

The town raised $100 to aid in the support of a High School, which for the first time was attempted last fall and continued through the winter.

The fall term was not very successful, in consequence of the ill health of the teacher and the continuance of the district schools in the village during that term, but it was thought not best to discontinue the school as it would accommodate those living at a distance, on some accounts better than the winter term.

A prompt and efficient teacher was procured for the winter term of this school, whose talents attracted a large number of scholars. He succeeded beyond expectation and the usefulness of his instructions and discipline justifies further appropriations for the same object.

THOMAS MEEKINS.
JAMES NICHOLS.
HIRAM HOLMES.

Division of School Money.

No.	By the Scholar.	By District.	Total.
1.	98 Scholars, $289 18	$10 00	$299 18
2.	22 " 64 92	25 00	89 92
3.	109 " 321 64		321 64
4.	17 " 50 16	35 00	85 16
5.	23 " 67 87	20 00	87 87
6.	18 " 53 11	37 00	90 11
7.			
8.	4 " 11 80	33 00	44 80
9.	14 " 41 32	40 00	81 32
	305 900 00	200 00	1100 00

